

REBEL DESTINY

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609 "The gods are friendly to you, Massa. The men have all noticed it. You look upon trees and falls with pleasure. When you see them, it is as if you met with a friend. That is good. But the gods have their powers, and men have theirs. The Rabbit says, 'Evil is everywhere.' Last night, you remember, there was a man who did not look up when you passed his house, and when you spoke 'Howdo' to him, he would not answer. He was an obia man. He would not take the hand of a white man. I have heard the men say there are others who are not glad that the white man has come so far, and that the gods have allowed it. . . ."

Abruptly he stopped. He had said more than he intended.

"I came to tell you about another thing," he continued after a moment of embarrassment. "You should know about fio-fio."

[753] Fio-fio was a small brown bug, and it was also a spirit. The spirit fio-fio brought sickness and death to human beings. For people like ourselves, untutored in the ways of the spirits, and the things which allowed them to gain sway over an individual, only a diviner could seek out the incident which had caused fio-fio to come.

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783 That was why it was necessary to bathe in a protecting fluid, to "wash fio-fio," even though we had not yet been stricken.

"Let me tell you how to wash fio-fio," he went on. "You must bathe when nobody sees you, and this is what you must have: the skin of a plantain we call the mother plantain that has been dried in smoke, and weeds which I will give you, and Negro-country pepper which I have with me, and seven pieces of chalk, and some eggshells. Some people put washing-blue in the water, too, but that you don't need. You can bathe in it early in the morning, or at noon, or right after sundown, but no one must see you."

He paused for a moment.

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578 "Do you not have fio-fio in your country? Look, this is how it is. You quarrel with a man who works for you, and he comes back and says he is sorry, and you say you are

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186 gods do not come to them." There was in her voice contempt for women who had no gods. She was of a reddish-brown color, taller and more slender than most, and the great coils of brass about her arms and ankles told that her beauty had had full recognition. These had come to her at marriage, as had the small earrings of gold which the bassia had brought to her from French Guiana. With these, too, had come cloths and handkerchiefs, beads and carvings.

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[291] If white women had no gods, did they know any of the other things which women must know? Did the white woman wear an apron underneath all her cloths, as women should? Were her thighs cicatrized? Did she cook for her husband, or other men, when she should be isolated in the special house provided for women's monthly visits? [841] Did she purify herself with sacred clay when she emerged from isolation in order not to spoil her husband's obias, for which contact with a woman who has her menses is the deadliest taboo? Why, having borne children, did her figure not show it?

[534] "Have you drums?" the bassia's wife asked. "Without drums, how do you pray? How do you dance?"

[535] Dancing without drums availed nothing.

"White women have no gods. The gods do not come to them. They are not troubled by the need to dance. White women do not pray," she concluded, seeing that what dancing the white woman did could only be a feeble affair.

"I will send my son to your country. The men who go to the French shore say it is good to know how to count the white man's way. My woman-child I will never send," she finished with finality.

Now it was the white woman's turn to ask a few questions, having done explaining how her boots laced, and why it was that she was dressed very much as her husband was dressed.

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983 The white clay in the hair and on the face of a small child was medicine. The child's mother had washed for her god that morning. He was a god whose day for dancing was Wednesday, and now, feeling the god stir in her, she would

A NIGHT AT S'EI

wash every day until Wednesday came to permit her to dance. When she washed with the sacred moistened clay, she rubbed the white on her children. 751
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"Will all the women dance on Wednesday who have the same god as you?"

The child's mother shook her head. "If the god comes to them, yes. If he doesn't come, they can't dance."

And the bassia's wife said, "The women who are in the menstrual house can't dance. When they hear the drums, they are troubled, but they must remain quiet." 841

The woman had spoken too eagerly and too loudly, for her husband, overhearing her, said something in a low rapid voice, and at once the women fell silent and several of them remembered errands they had to see to. 593

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"When men are in the council house, you mustn't interrupt," said the bassia's wife to the white woman. "If we did what you did just now, our husbands would scold us when they got home, and if we did it again, they would beat us." 576
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She had taken upon herself all the prerogatives of friendship, and continually criticized the manners of her visitor.

The old were to be greeted last. A gift was to be received by another. When returning a piece of carving to another's hand, the carving should rest on the outstretched palm, while the elbow of that arm lay on the palm of the other hand. In the presence of men, a woman who took a stool should turn it about and sit on its narrower side.

"Never sit on the bare earth. The spirits don't like it," she said one instant, and the next, "Don't play with your fingers on top of your sun helmet. Your breasts will get long. Drumming is not a thing for women." 806
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There had been other warnings during earlier visits to Bush Negro villages, but none had borne down so heavily upon the shortcomings of the stranger.

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84 It appeared that nothing in a woman's life was so dreaded
85 as childbearing, nothing more coveted than fertility, and no
time so difficult and so anxious as when a woman was
rearing her children.

782 "The day before a girl marries she prays all day to her
584 gods," said Dida, who with Fenekonde and several other
women had joined us. "I begged my god Kesekia and gave
him rice and rum. All day they played the agida. I begged
[842] him not to hate my husband. I begged him to give us
children."

843 When a woman conceived, her husband made her many
831 obias, and especially a black sack obia with four cowries
751 sewed on it, to keep her safe on the paths which led from
782 village to village, and from village to her field. The fear
of the power of bad magic at this time was so great that,
if we but looked at one of the pregnant women, or let our
eyes rest on the several obias she wore, she grew nervous,
covered them with both her hands, and disappeared in
fear that the very power of our glance might weaken the
potency of the charms. She did not believe in the white
man's magic, but she was not in a condition to wish to put
it to a test.

844 "When her time comes, a woman sees to it that she is in
782 her own village," said Fenekonde. "It is not good to give
birth in the bush, or on the river."

This had almost happened to Wilhelmina with her last
child. She was on the river alone in a boat. Chief Sungi
of Dahomey met her and called on his gods to delay the
coming of the child until he brought her home. He had
strong obia, and so the misfortune was averted.

When the woman felt the first labor-pains, she prayed to
the gods, and to her personal spirits. On the great Sky God
she called, and the Earth Mother; on her ak'a, her soul;
on the Yorika, the ancestors; and then she prayed to her
personal gods, and particularly to whatever snake gods
she might have, for some of these were known to be jealous
of a coming child. But none of the gods dared be slighted.

WOMEN AT WORK

"Before she begs the gods, she is seated on a mat, or on cloths. Over her head a white cloth is thrown. The woman who is there to look after the coming of the child takes a calabash with water. Then she throws the water on the ground where the woman is seated. She begs the great gods, and the ancestors, and the woman's soul, and the woman's gods. 844 780

"When the pains come, she ties a cloth about her belly tight, tight, until it hurts. The woman who helps her gives her some water if she wants it, and she presses down on the belly and makes the cloth tighter and tighter, until the child comes. The cord is cut with a knife." 844

The knife was the same as the kind they used for cicatrizing, and the after-birth was buried behind the house, in a small hole into which food and a piece of the sacred sangrafu wood was thrown. [12]

"The child is washed, and then *pemba*—kaolin—is put on its forehead, and after that the mother and the child bathe every day and then wash in *pemba*. Sometimes a moon comes and wanes, and another comes, and the mother still puts the white on herself and on her child." [75] •

But if the birth proved to be difficult, then the husband was told, and he besought his own ancestors and his own gods to help his woman and child. 845

"If the child doesn't come, then it's a bad spirit. Then they call the *obia* man."

When a woman had difficulty, everybody was troubled about it. If a woman had been unfaithful to her husband and had not confessed it, it would be that which would be killing the child in her womb, and killing her as well. Sometimes it was *wisi*—black magic—and everybody wondered who had sent it to their village. Sometimes it was a god who was envious. [754]

"If it is a god, then, when the woman is strong again, she goes to a more powerful god and buys from him the next child to come into her womb. The strong god sees to it that the jealous one finds no way to harm the child." 845 796 842

What happened when a child was born dead? [166]

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1773 of the earth. In one kingdom, a ruler sent the heralds to proclaim throughout the land that he who killed the bird would get half his kingdom, and his daughter in marriage. Anansi, the spider, killed a hawk and brought it to the ruler. But Anansi lied when he said this was the bird that shook the earth with its cries. At the very time he was trying to persuade all the people that [redacted] the bird, the cries of the ominous bird were heard. So they put Anansi in jail. Now one day there was born to a woman a child who at birth wore a cloth of pieced designs, and a hunting sack. This boy said to his mother, he said, "Give me a little water, mother, and I will go out into the world to learn wisdom. God has sent me to kill the bird which troubles mankind."

When the boy grew to manhood he succeeded in trapping this bird that knew how to cook obia without fire. He killed the bird and took the obia pot with him, and that is how he came by the secrets of obia. He passed on his knowledge to the men of his family, and this has been going on till today, so that obia is being spread throughout the world by the descendants of this man who killed the bird that knew obia.

1776 But obia was not one thing only.

"Obia," Bayo's uncle had said, "is first of all the spirit. It is everywhere. But there are many kinds of obia. There is black man's obia, and there is white man's obia. Here in the bush black man's obia is the strongest.

1789 "A man who has the obia spirit makes obia to wear, and
1778 obia to drink, and obia to rub the body with, and obia water
1776 for bathing. He can make obia drums and obia benches. The spirit tells you how to do things, and it tells you what to do. When we say a man has strong obia, we mean his spirit is strong."

1756 The Bush Negro obia man, said Bayo to us one day, knew
1751 the things the white doctor knew—he knew how to heal—
1789 and he knew other things, too. He knew how to keep sickness away. The things an obia man gave for healing were

SARAMACCA OBIA

called obias. The charms he gave for warding off illness and evil were obias, too. 756
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"So we call all these things. But each obia has a name. Every charm I wear is an obia, but if I wore the one you are wearing, it would be a soul cord, an *ak'a tetei*. One below the knee we call *asumani* in my village, and one for the wrist *afimu*. The one on the upper arm is named *ando*. But there are many names, and they are all obia, because inside them is the spirit obia which gives them power. When a man sells you an obia and passes its power on to you, he breathes on your hands as they hold the obia. When he does it, he gives you the obia spirit which went into the making of this obia. If he did not make it himself, the spirit was given him by the obia man, and he gives it to you."

Obia, then, is the spirit; obia is the preventive and curing agent; obias are the charms that are worn by people to help them. Some have called these obias "fetiches," but even a slight understanding of them should be enough to bring the outsider to the realization that the object of itself is meaningless, and that it is only the power that has been given the charm that makes it effective. 776
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Yet it is not strange that the importance of the fetich has been overestimated, for if the visitor did not draw out the Bush Negroes about their gods and their theories of the universe, the existence of these higher powers would almost go unrecognized. For everywhere there are to be found obias guarding the village, obias screening paths, obias worn by the people. That they are important to the Bush Negro is obvious. But they are important for day-by-day existence, and they do not possess the overwhelming importance of the great spirits who control the universe. 776
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Many of these charms came to us as tangible evidence of the belief in obia. Some of those we acquired were of a unique character because of the power that was latent in them, some because of the intricacy of their taboos. Yet all of them paled in interest and in arresting quality beside the Kromanti Mama that came to us one night in secret.

576 *bah?*" In other words, "Brother, (Sister, Father, Mother) howdy, how-do-you-do?"

- 751 There is a ceremony connected with the simple act of entering a Bush Negro town. A stranger might bring in foul intentions or evil spirits. The village must be protected against this horrific possibility, so nearly every path leading to the town has a magic device, known as an *azang pau*, to keep the spirits out. It consists of a dry stick across the path overhead, to which palm fronds are lashed. They hang down, brushing over everyone who passes beneath. The visitor passes under the *azang pau*, and is cleared of evil spirits that might harm the inhabitants of the village.

[778] The Djukas have invisible enemies. On either side of the path, near the palm barrier, is the wooden statue of a fetish to provide protection from these enemies. The fetish named *Cromanti*, on one side, protects the village from the evil spirit that dwells in the silk-cotton tree, the *con con dree*. Opposite him stands *Aflamu*, who secures the village against the attacks of a mighty tribe of unseen men, who are the sworn enemies of the Bush Negro and kill him with invisible arrows.

Walking up from the river we reach the barrier, and pause before it for the customary ritual. But Abaisa is a potent chief, the head of his *lo* or clan, the *Abaisa-lo*. So long as the *bahkra* accompanies him, no ceremony is necessary. We enter unchallenged into the clearing beyond.

- 648 The usual procedure is for the white man to hang back and let his paddler precede him. Moi-Man gains admittance to re-

- 301 his much-loved ornamentation. Leg-bands of cotton cloth are frequently worn by both sexes, and where wire can be secured it is fashioned into arm or leg coils and paraded proudly.
- [751] Many necklaces and bracelets are used because they constitute magic amulets against evil spirits. Our own bracelets and necklaces can probably be traced back to this same origin.
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- 302 The hair is another means of personal decoration, and therefore it is always dressed with deliberation. Carefully made partings divide the black skull into geometrical designs.
- 834 Despite the scanty nature of their clothing, the Djukas are quite modest, and never expose themselves. If a bahkra does, they avert their heads. It is a curious reflection on civilized morality that the almost naked blacks possess a large amount of dignified restraint, while the uncomfortably clothed white man is shameless in his nudity.



- 322 Here and there inside the dark huts can be seen bits of extraordinary wood carving. These are not crude utensils; every stirring-paddle or comb is a work of art worthy of a place in a museum, designed and executed in a way that is far from "primitive." The only way to acquire these objects is to bargain for them in Dutch money or tobacco, or cheap knick-knacks. Among the more distant villages money is use-

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severe attack of winti. She fell upon her knees and appeared ⁸²⁵ half lame. The others lifted her up. A youth came with a ⁷⁹⁶ green stick; he bit into it and spat on the woman's calves, ¹⁵⁸ legs, feet, and arms. After a while she was able to stand alone. This seemed to constitute the end of the dance. It had somehow become known that the Papa Gadu, the snake spirit, was angry, and this big *gadu pray* (god's spread) had been necessary in order to propitiate him.

The women who are seized with the winti sometimes mutter a few words. The others regard these as the utterances of a spirit and say: "*Ya, gadu*"—"yes, God." Upon inquiry among the women who had caught the winti spirit, Mr. de Goeje found that they all complained of feeling very dizzy or giddy when in such a trance.



Certain localities, as well as individuals, may be possessed ⁷⁷⁶ by evil spirits. The Pwaba Creek is such a place. Were a ⁷⁵¹ Djuka to go up this creek with any clothing on, he would never come out alive. So upon entering the waters of Pwaba the Djuka strips off all his clothes. That nullifies the bad magic.

Every Bush Negro, to protect himself from all varieties ⁷⁵¹ of black magic, wears a number of charms or amulets. He ⁷⁷⁸

751 calls them *obeiahs*. An obeiah is a charm or a form of magic
 778 to be distinguished from a *trafer*, which is a taboo. Obeiahs
 may be worn in the form of bracelets or necklaces, called *boe*.
 Bush Negroes never start out on a hunting or river trip with-
 out a number of boe around the arm, or leg, or neck. Thus the
 machinations of the evil spirits are set at naught.

One boe which Abaisa made for us is formed of heavy
 wire wrapped with white cord and set with cowrie shells.
 Worn on the arm, this will make you very strong. The charm
 will protect you while engaged in dangerous doings, such as
 [43] drinking river water after someone has been drowned in it.
 Abaisa made this bracelet out of friendship. It was given, not
 purchased; therefore the old-time gods are not offended at
 its being possessed by a white man.

[712] He presented it with great solemnity, taking a mouthful
 of rum and spitting it on the ground as a libation to the
 ground god, then squirting another mouthful over the brace-
 let. After that we all had a swallow of the same liquid and
 [55] Abaisa said a prayer in deepee-talkee. A somewhat similar
 ceremony attended the giving of a Djuka name to the white
 man—*Abentee*, provider.

751 The cowrie shells with which the obeiah is set are smeared
 321 with pemba dotee. The clay closes up the openings of the
 778 shells, thus preventing evil spirits from entering into the in-
 terior. These cowrie shells, which decorate practically all the
 [71] magic emblems of the Djukas, are commonly found among
 the savages of Africa, both on the East and West Coasts. They
 are also common in African art work, and at one time con-
 stituted a form of currency, *papa mani*.

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stituted a form of currency, *papa moni*. They come originally ⁷⁷⁸ from the East Indies, having been brought to both Africa and ⁷⁵¹ South America by Portuguese traders. When a savage takes ^[17] a fancy to a thing, he will go to some trouble to get hold of it. Thus the tin cans of the Standard Oil Company have penetrated into almost every primitive community now known.

Projecting from the wrapped cord around Abaisa's boe is a bit of blue cloth to ward off the spirit of a dead enemy. A bit of red cloth blinds the wearer to evil sights and makes him serene. A small strand of white cloth provides protection from the bad spirits called *Bakru*. Underneath the cloth are bristles from the anteater to give strength. All these charms make the obeiah bracelet a powerful affair.

Another boe is used to foretell the future. It is similar to ⁷⁷⁸ the bracelet, but projecting from the wrapped cord is a short ⁷⁸⁷ bit of tubing. The device is suspended from a string and held motionless, the tube pointing toward the ground. When no air is stirring a question is asked concerning the future. If the pointer remains motionless the answer is "yes," but if it moves the reply is "no." In this simple way the Bush Negro acquires knowledge of coming events. Our tent boy had several questions he wanted to ask, and when they were answered he had "a peculiar feeling."

Another obeiah that we obtained is a jaguar-tooth neck-⁷⁷⁸ lace. Strung on the same string with the pierced tooth are two little carved fetishes of Cromanti and *Aflamu*, crudely done. All religious articles are extremely crude in their carving, compared with the delicate tracery of Djuka implement

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301 as the European girl wears her bracelets. On their fingers they wear a number of copper rings, sometimes doubtless up to ten; the thumb is likewise generally decorated with them.

291 /28/ As a rule the men content themselves with merely
292 a simple loincloth or belt, but if they go so far as to dress up, then they wear a broad-brimmed hat which is usually painted with various colors; around the crown they wear a wide band whose ends hang far down over the brim.

301 Around their necks they frequently wear a string of tiger's
237 teeth and the incisors and molars of wild pigs (the pakier and piengo) and of other animal species that they have caught on the hunt; they wear these same ornaments hanging from a broad band under the knee, and to them is added now and then a shell, a piece of copper, iron, lead, and so forth. Their ornaments also include parrot and West Indian raven (1) feathers and small tassels

1. Lafroe, Paitracus macao L.

made of cotton.

301 They call the last-named obias (2). Just like the women,
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292 2. Obia, charm. The same efficacious powers as the superstition sees in amulets and talismans are seen in this.

they wear colored cloths around the neck.

304 Like almost all tropical and African peoples, they tattoo themselves. Men, women, and children undergo this operation, and although they are set upon having this as ornamentation, they nonetheless look down upon the man decorated with many tattoos just as the European does on an effeminate dandy. There are among them those whose face and body are virtually covered with the incisions, but they are looked upon with contempt by the industrious and those most developed spiritually. They say that the former are too attached to luxury and must be lazy to waste

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The Kumēnti. These gods are common to the Saramaka
(Kromenti) (1), Djuka, and Boni. The Kumēnti are considered

1. There is no doubt about the origin of this word; it is a deformation of Coromantin, name given in the 18th century to Ashanti country. The "Coromantin Negroes," reputed to be particularly intractable, played a large role in the slave revolts. The Kumēnti cult of possession must originally have been a cult peculiar to the Coromantin nation.

to be benevolent gods and friends of men, so their possession is very much desired. They do not come into men spontaneously, they are obtained only by applying to a teacher. In principle only men can obtain Kumēnti, while on the other hand only women can have Būnzunki /sic/.

The Kumēnti are specialized in protection against fire and against machete and gun wounds. These dangers hold the largest place among the anxieties of the Refugee Blacks, who spend almost all their life in the bush and with whom nearly all sores become infected and have serious consequences. Thus the Kumēnti cult holds an important place in their magic; even someone who is not possessed will try to obtain from these gods an obia that will protect him from these various dangers.

The instruction of the disciples of these gods takes as its pattern the procedures described above, but the collective dances appear to play an essential part. The teacher calls on the gods by beating a special rhythm on ordinary drums (apinti) and by uttering invocations punctuated by the rattle of the saka (Indian maraca, that is, hollow calabash provided with a handle and containing seeds).

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784 If someone has a Kumēnti, certain objects used in the cult: pestle, mortar, machete, must not be raised near him. His gita "would rise" immediately. Likewise while he is eating, neither tiger nor gun must be mentioned. To prevent their gita from rising, those concerned may take the precaution of putting a small piece of wood behind the ear while they eat.

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788 These past years the cult of the Kumēnti was clearly declining among the Boni, as was the whole of their religious life; every one, indeed, no longer thought about anything but earning money and was always traveling in order to do this, which made difficult the indispensable meetings and dances. On the other hand, cared for effectively when they are ill in the Maripasoula hospital, the Boni feel the cult of the Kumēnti less necessary, of which the principal social function is to cure. So, while in 1948 we used to be present very often at manifestations of the gita of Kumēnti, in 1952 they were becoming much rarer and more secret /modest/. They were tending to fall to the level of the latent manifestations of which we shall speak further on. In 1956 we did not observe in the course of the forest work any spontaneous attack of this gita. The chapels dedicated to the Kumēnti are scarcely maintained and are falling into ruins; such is the fate of the gods judged benevolent toward men.
[346] Nevertheless people continue to lay great store by the obia of Kumēnti, especially the man nēge obia which protects against the machete and the gun, and the Kumēnti but, ring of Kumēnti, instrument of divination.

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[823] The Būnūyūki. The Būnūyūki are gods which live in the waters, by preference at the head of falls, beside rocks bearing copies of detached trees; they can also reside ordinarily in these trees themselves. They appear sometimes in dreams to men as well as to women in the aspect of Indians, more commonly Indian women with long hair. This is why they are sometimes called uxta Ingi, Indians of The water.
[787]

754 /238 cont. / The struggle against

781 wisi is one of the foundations of their social life, protection against the undertakings of the wisimā one of the most constant worries of each person. Nobody knows these wisimā with certainty; one is reduced to vague suspicions of this or that person, which one dares not formulate for lack of proof. No one knows exactly how they operate. Yet each one feels their enterprises everywhere about him, and those who by reason of their wealth or successes with women have the most reason to believe themselves exposed to jealousy live in anxiety.

754 Intense jealousy or hate are already a form of wisi, and
 782 this is why each one must try to drive them out of his heart;
 784 besides, he would risk falling ill or being subject to all sorts of calamities for having broken his oath. But the wisimā employs explicit procedures:

--Burying a bottle (beli bata) containing sorcery under his enemy's door. When the latter comes home, the sorcery will penetrate into him. So some Refugee Blacks carry a special obia against this kind of aggression: thanks to this obia, they will feel a sharp pain in the tip of the foot when approaching the bottle, which they will thus uncover easily.

754 --Kisi akkaa, stealing the akka of the enemy. The latter
 794 then becomes mad. The Boni believe that the wisimā operates at night, taking advantage of the fact that the enemy's akka has left his body to wander. He captures it by attracting it with what it likes. For that, one must know the name of his enemy's akka, know its tastes and preferences; all things which each Refugee Black will carefully hide, even from his comrades. What the wisimā does with the akka was not clear to any of our informants. He tries either to capture it in order to deprive his enemy of it, or to make it hostile to its bearer, or to inspire it with abnormal ideas or tastes. If someone manifests an abnormal change /239/ in tastes or behavior, people will be inclined to think that a wisimā was able to act upon his akka.

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751 Principal obia. The Kumēnti bui, bracelet of Kumēnti, which is not to be confused with the man nēge obia, is materialized by a bracelet of fibers not worn on the arm but shut up in one's small trunk. It is a polyvalent obia which insures at the same time (787) the protection of its owner against the machete and the gun, his material prosperity and his moral security, for it furnishes him with a very highly esteemed procedure of divination.

751 This obia must be prepared each time on the orders of a (787) Kumēnti and in its presence in the body of a possessed person. It is the Kumēnti which designates the leaves to go and get and the processing to make them undergo; according to the information which we have been able to get, this consists of plunging into the infusion of leaves first a machete, then an axe, both red hot, while the postulant recites formulas intended to fix in the obia the power he desires (that the machete may not cut me, that I become rich, etc.).

751 The man nēge obia, exclusively intended for protection against the machete and gun, is materialized by a crudely fashioned iron ring clasp ing the arm a little below the shoulder (1).

1. The fact of wearing an iron ring on the arm does not necessarily correspond with possession of this obia. In general, commoner obia intended to protect from leprosy are concerned.

This obia must not be confused with the obia Kumēnti. Obtaining possession by a Kumēnti and the man nēge obia /sic/ are two different things, corresponding to different rites.

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751 Possession by a Kumēnti gives, they say, invulnerability
[1987] during the time of the trance, but in his ordinary state the individual remains vulnerable (they say only that in case of danger the gita "rises" immediately).

Someone who has a man nēga obia has no trances of possession, but they state that he is permanently invulnerable (except for breaking of the kina). In order to obtain this obia one must have himself "washed" for a very long time by an elder who knows the leaves in question. He delivers them already crushed so that no one may be able to know this secret outside of the son or nephew to whom he bequeaths it.

It is necessary to continue to be washed four times a year for 15 days each time, to keep up the force of the obia.

[515] During these 15 days one bathes three times a day, in secret (in principle nobody knows that you have this obia).

[834] During these periods one must have no relation with a woman, even to talk to her.

They state that someone who has a man nēga obia can be struck by blows of a machete and even receive a gunshot with impunity.

[173] They believe that this obia, in the past called man feti obia, was obtained by the ancestors at the time of the wars against the whites; still today it inspires an unshakeable confidence. /250/ In October, 1952 we saw M..., a man of 45

[164] with great good sense, make a deep gash in his leg while
[1952] cutting a liana, in spite of his obia. Doubt did not cross his mind for a second: he told us that certainly he had unknowingly eaten something contrary to the kina of the obia. Since we were working near some villages, he went immediately to find the master of the remedy to have the power restored. For nothing in the world would he have left for a long round of work in the bush with the feeling that he was at the mercy of an accident.

/250 cont. /

- 751 Next in the preoccupations of the Refugee Blacks come the obia called tapu, that is to say, protection. There exist numerous kinds adapted to the various dangers of a supernatural order (protection against other divinities, against the maleficent entities of the bush, against the wisimā).

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[754] The Ampuku are generally asked for tapu against the wisimā. We saw a remarkable one in front of the house of F... (Dju). Its owner was not a little proud of it and he talked about it to us freely.

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[532] The obia, placed at ground level in front of the door, was composed of a crude representation in clay of a head in which appeared two wide-open eyes: in front of it were planted in the ground three plant clusters including a planting of ground-nuts and one of maize; the whole was topped by a small basket containing an egg. It was necessary to water the obia with a certain infusion of leaves at regular intervals to restore its force.

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754 This obia insured infallible protection against wisimā; in fact, none of them would have been able to cross the threshold without stubbing his toe on the door frame in spite of all his precautions; F... stated that his obia constituted by this fact an effective means of detection of wisimā, for it was enough for him to invite suspects to enter his hut, to know what to think; the wisimā refused, for fear of thus being given away in the eyes of all; one could thus at least pin down suspicions.

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[411] Other obia are called sama m̄fu t̄t̄y (obia against "people's mouths," that is, people's jealousy). They are nearly always seen on fine guns; they have a cord to hold them made of m̄riti palm fibers, to which two cowries are fastened.

755 The obia intended to treat diseases generally have for support a calabash containing the infusion of leaves and a ball of p̄emba (kaolin). The person concerned sprinkles himself several times a day with this liquid.

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396 There exist special obia for the building of boats. The opening of the hull in the fire, a delicate operation, sometimes fails. To insure its success everyone possesses a personal recipe inherited from his father or uncle. It does not call by name and directly upon the action of a god; the Boni do not have a clear idea about the origin or the nature of these rites. It is a matter of a maceration of two or three kinds of leaves, generally belonging to the secondary flora which surrounds the villages, and they vary from one man to another. One pours this maceration over the overturned boat before the burning is begun, while saying: "The boat must not split, it must open well."

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[673] The laws of Odun forbid the use of charms aimed at forcing the love of a woman one desires; that would infringe on a person's freedom, therefore wisi. It is very /251/ possible however that certain people go to get charms of this kind from Creole magicians. But they take for granted, on the other hand, the obia believed to permit men who have little success with women to have more in the future.

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789 There does not seem to be any hierarchy of obia nor is one category of obia believed to be stronger by nature than another; in fact, the Refugee Blacks are seen to go readily to ask one divinity for an obia in order to protect themselves from another. Here is an example:

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[648] In 1951 the administration had a systematic cleaning of the Petit Inini River begun, in order to rid its course of innumerable pieces of fallen wood which were making the use of motors on boats difficult. A team of Boni were employed in this work under the direction of a Creole foreman. While the work was being done, a Papa gadu "came into the head" of an old woman named M... of the Awara Bakka lo. It revealed that it was opposed to this work, for it lived in exactly this place and the noise of the motors bothered it. Upon their return to Boni country, the men charged with this work learned the

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464 decision of the god and under some pretext or other refused to
776 resume work. In August, 1952, while we were on a work trip
• 751 /en mission/, an ɔbiamā made it known that an Ampuku was
791 willing to give a tapu, that is, an ɔbia of protection, against
[465] this Papa gadu. We were present at a discussion in the course
of which several Boni planned to take up this work again, but
asking for raised wages to cover the expenses of the ɔbia (1).

[171]

1. Situations of this kind are common in the Guianan forest, even among Creoles. For difficult or unusual work, the high wages demanded serve in part to remunerate magicians.

751 These expenses amounted to about 5,000 francs per person, or:
435 --3,000 for the payment of the god, including red cloth,
791 dark-blue cloth, white beads, beer, rum, cowries; the ɔbiamā
would take them to set them out in the forest.

--1,500 for payment for the work of the ɔbiamā, including a piece of canvas /toile/, beer, a container /bidon/ of powder, a chicken.

751 The remedy would consist of an infusion of leaves with which one should "wash one's body" morning and evening for the duration of the work.

As for the Creole foreman, he prudently had himself assigned to another job.

751 They have the habit of asking an Ampuku for protection
776 against a Papa gadu and conversely (we have cited an example of this above), but they do not ask a Kumēnti for protection; the Kumēnti occupy themselves only with illnesses.

/251 cont. /

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789 Renewal of the power of the obia. The Refugee Blacks have the idea that no magic power can last if it is not renewed by formulas and offerings appealing to the god from which it came.

[824] Each year, at variable dates for each obia, one must renew the power of the obia by dipping the support object into a maceration of certain leaves. This renewal may not take place on January 1. On that day all leaves lose their power. /252/

[768] Mr. W. F. van Lier writes that among the Djuka, objects (bracelets, etc.) serving as support for a magic remedy are thrown away upon the death of the owner for they have lost all power. The Boni do not have this conception; with them, [84]
[428] these objects keep their value for the dead person's son provided that before dying he voluntarily transmitted them to him by giving him mula.

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613 Transmission of obia. An obia is often bequeathed simultaneously to a son and to a nephew. Care is taken not to lose the obia for the lineage. Thus it is that certain lineages have certain obia as their specialty.

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[771] Kāndu. The Refugee Blacks call kāndu a magic object intended to protect property (houses, harvests) against theft. This procedure is also very much used by the Creoles.

There are three common kinds of kāndu:

--Piiti tiki kāndu. It is made of a split stick stuck into the ground, in the slit of which dry banana leaves or small sticks are placed horizontally. This device originated in Dahomey.

--Sikopu kāndu. It involves a shovel stuck into the ground in front of the house (the idea of the shovel is associated with the idea of death, for this instrument is used particularly in digging graves).

--Bɔɔ kāndu, made up of a bow and arrow planted in the ground.

/252 cont. /

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The one who installs a kāndu utters the formula: mi poti yu ya. Efu a sama kom fu fufu mi sani, yu mu siki en (I put thee here; if someone comes to steal my belongings, thou must make him sick).

[784]

If someone goes beyond [it] and commits a theft, he will be struck sooner or later with various sicknesses.

According to the conceptions of the Refugee Blacks, the kāndu is blind and strikes as well the friend who came to take objects because he received previous authorization to do it. So, many forego placing kāndu, as with us, people hesitate to set wolf-traps for fear of causing accidents.

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However, the kāndu does not act upon the people who have the same basic interdiction (bwasi kina) as the one who placed it. This conception shows that these interdictions transmitted from father to children really are the mark of true patrilineages.

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In fact, we have ascertained several times, there are burglaries in Boni country in spite of the kāndu and people do not succeed in uncovering the burglars; it is infinitely probable that one must not see in this the stamp of freethinkers who do not believe in sorcery; these are people who have obtained from a wisimā a talisman of black magic stronger than the kāndu! At least this is the explanation their victims give.

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One can lift a kāndu on behalf of any man, whom one wants, for example, to send to get an object which one has forgotten; for that it is sufficient to give him mula: one blows into one's hands and lays them on the man's head, saying: mi puu a kāndu gi yu, a 'ā mu du a sani āga yu: I withdraw the kāndu for thee, it must not do anything to thee. /253/

Mula can be given retroactively: If someone perceives that he has inadvertently incurred the chastisement of a kāndu, he has several days to be able to ask for mula from the owner, for the action of the kāndu is slow.

/253 cont. /

Various Beliefs

578 Fyo-fyo. If a Boni is on bad terms with someone of his lineage or of another lineage, he has the absolute right to turn a cold shoulder to him and stop having anything to do with him. But if, hiding his rancor, he seeks, from selfish motives, to maintain the appearance of friendly relations, he risks falling ill, being struck by various calamities, or even dying from the effect of what the Refugee Blacks call a fyo-fyo. The nature of this force is not clear; they know only that its support is a small, common insect named fyo-fyo. They declare that if a person dies from the consequences of a fyo-fyo, one of these insects will be seen leaving his body through the nose at the moment of death.

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[775] Taku sani. By this name the Refugee Blacks designate maleficent entities of the bush, which they imagine as of nonhuman nature by contrast to the taku yorika, wandering spirits of dead people rejected by society. These entities are lower beings devoid of consciousness but dangerous for men into whom they may enter, rendering them sick or mad. Certain of these entities are believed to reside in plants, like the kokoti, others are thought to take on the appearance of dwarfs (bakuf), whom certain people believe they sometimes see at dawn on the outskirts of villages.

751 One protects oneself against taku sani by special obia, and those who do not feel completely secure take a certain number of precautions in addition, like that of tearing up the leaves they have used for drinking water from creeks.

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751 / Tyifunga (1). This is the name of the magic enclosures made
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[824]

1. They also use the word azāg, borrowed from the Fon of Dahomey.

offshoots / "tongues" / of pinot palm, pina tāngo, attached to a string, with which on certain occasions a village is completely surrounded. These enclosures are thought to bar the passage of the evil spirits of the bush (taku sani); they are put up especially in the case of an epidemic, as well as before the great festivals which attract a crowd of persons among whom wisimā can slip in. After putting the enclosure in place, people arrange themselves in a line at one end of the village and move along slowly so as to sweep its whole surface, firing guns, making all the noise possible by striking metallic objects and striking the ground with reeds to expel the evil spirits. This is what is called naki tyifunga. The elders repeat the formula: "U naki tyifunga fu agi na: mu ku a so (We strike tyifunga so that the evil (spirits) may not be able to come to earth)."

The magic fence is then left in place until it is rotten.

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76 Beliefs about leprosy. Lepers are buried at the limits of the cemetery, but they are not considered cursed, and mourning for them is carried out normally.

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784 /254/ They take for granted that if someone is attacked by leprosy, it is because he has "broken" his bwasi kina. They think that an enemy can, because of ill will, hide a bit of the forbidden fare in the food. This is why the Boni do not willingly tell one another their interdictions.

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If someone realizes that he has broken his kina, he goes to see, not an ɔbiaman, but the specialist-healer of leprosy and asks him to treat him by way of prevention.

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Beliefs about guns and hunting. The gun, which entered the everyday life of the Refugee Blacks two centuries ago, has taken an important place in their magic. It is the symbol of virility. A Refugee Black who no longer has a gun is a man humiliated and almost dishonored. As one of them explained to us in begging us to help him replace his old gun eaten by rust: "If you cannot present yourself before the women with a machete, hunting bag on your shoulder, and gun in your hand, you are not a man."

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This idea has been transposed onto the plane of magic and they take for granted that the wisimā can, by putting evil spells on a gun, attack the owner of the weapon in his virility. It is supposed to be enough for someone to put his finger into the barrel of the gun while uttering a formula of vengeance, or even being moved by hate for the owner of the weapon, for this gun to be no longer capable of hitting the mark. So, to avoid these misfortunes, the Boni never part with their guns and never lend them to anyone. If, in spite of these precautions, they have the impression that a gun no longer fires so well, they will go to an ɔbiaman to have it washed of maleficent influence. There exist for that purpose several remedies all of which consist of soaking the gun for one to three days in infusions of leaves, which has the unfailing result of making it rust. We have seen a hammerless, latest model gun spoiled thus by an intelligent Boni head boatman, a clever mechanic and usually full of good sense.

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We have never witnessed among the Boni any individual or collective hunting rites claiming to attract game or to promote meeting it (when, on the contrary, hunting piayes are extremely widespread among the Creoles).

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841 Woman's magic power. The Refugee Blacks assume that a woman, during her menstrual periods, is impure and has the power to destroy the power of obia. So during these periods she must withdraw into a special hut, munu ɔsu, and prepare her meals in special dishes; she may not prepare her husband's food, for by doing this she would destroy the power of his obia, and must abstain from touching objects he habitually uses, particularly his gun, which would lose its good points for shooting. Even in the little farming habitations which consist of only several huts, one may be sure that one of them serves as a munu ɔsu.

841 The munu ɔsu are very simple sheds built by the women
343 themselves, using reclaimed materials taken from huts being
462 demolished; some belong to one woman only; for others, three
[465] or four women get together. They have recourse to men only
for assembling the framework, remunerating them with several
cans of couac or several baskets of yams.

841 /255/ A man who has a powerful obia like the man nenge ɔbia
must abstain from speaking to a woman who has her menses.

• (751) The Boni assume there are women wicked enough to
willfully hide their menses in order to destroy the power of a
man's obia, but he who has a good man nenge ɔbia cannot be
a dupe: the iron circle warns him of the danger by squeezing
his arm.

184 According to Mr. W. F. van Lier, the act of willfully
841 hiding her menses is for the Djuka one of the gravest offenses
68 a woman can commit, and the most severe punishments are
inflicted on her. It is not the same with the Boni: in such a
case a woman risks only being insulted and banned.

752 Another deeply rooted belief among the Refugee Blacks,
834 and which exists with many Creoles, is the necessity for the
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A... of the Dju lo, about 28 years old in 1958, must observe six kina:

--The cayman and the jaguar as bwasi kina.

--The otter (yundu) as akka kina. /256/

These three kina have been imposed on him since his first years, but the meaning of them was explained to him only later on.

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--The eel (mānsi) was imposed on him as a kina by his father when the latter gave him a man nēyge ōbia, ōbia of protection against machete or gun, materialized by an iron bracelet.

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To this ōbia is attached another kina. A... must not speak to a woman having her menstrual period.

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--Finally, the crab (kaabu), kina attached to an ōbia of which the man concerned only spoke with reticence, probably a Kumēnti bui (bracelet of Kumēnti, instrument of divination).

A... has no gadu kina in the strict sense of the term.

There exists no food kina common to all the Boni; the cayman is generally forbidden to them as bwasi kina, associated with another animal; but this is not absolute; we know at least one Boni who has not received this kina.

If someone has broken a kina inadvertently, he can have himself cleansed of this offense by ōbiaman. But if he broke it willfully, he cannot escape the punishment attached to the offense.

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Beliefs about twins. They have the idea that twins and children who follow twins are of a nature different from other men, participating in a divine principle.

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Twins cannot live (since they do not belong to ordinary humanity) if they are not treated with a special remedy known only to certain lineages especially rich in twins.

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This worship is celebrated each time there is occasion to protect newborn babies. They are washed with a certain decoction of leaves.

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Every four or five years on the average a big dance takes place, then the father and mother of twins and the twins themselves are washed in order to maintain their powers and keep them in good health.

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If these dances are not held, dead twins will show their anger by making living twins and parents of twins sick.

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Lineages that do not have twins do not practice these rites. If twins are born to them, they will apply at the place of worship of another lineage.

Papaiston and Lapé have this cult particularly highly developed.

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Tone pikin. It is assumed that a woman may be made pregnant by a river god, either a Papa gadu snake god or by the Wata lagi, which look like Indians. Children thus conceived are called tone pikin.

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A . . . , of Papaiston, had cut a clearing opposite a remarkable white rock called Weti st3, where she used to moor her boat. She had not had any children for several years and she became pregnant. When her daughter was born a possessed person revealed that she was born of a Papa gadu snake god which lived there: since then her parents /relatives/ go regularly to this rock to make offerings.

About 1910 Alama (Kormotibo) had followed her husband to a shipyard on the lower river; one day while walking in the forest she met an Indian having the appearance of a Galibi Indian, who was carrying a newborn baby. She stopped and admired the baby. The Indian said to her: "Do you wish to raise him?" She acquiesced. He said: "We shall see each other again"; then he went away so quickly that she had the impression that he had disappeared on the spot.

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*539 so that the people will see you." She answered: "It is I who will drag you as far as the bush." They discussed it to the insult stage, and wagered. They agreed to set Sunday as the test time; she should pull the end of a rope going out from the village. She said: "Very well." -- "I am proud of my ancestors, Bush-Mama. You will not drag me into the bush, I am the one who will drag you inside the village."

Then he came back to the village and went to the river. He rushed into the water, dyou! he went up to the Water-Mama. He said to her: "Will you have a tug-of-war against me? The Water-Mama answered: "It is I who will drag you into the river." Anansi said: "I am sure to drag you up on land so that the people will see how you look." Again they wagered and set Sunday as the test day. He said: "Very well, on the day set I shall come into the water to hold out the end of a rope to you." The Water-Mama said: "Very well. I shall stay there to take the end of the rope." We shall see who is a man and who is not."

He went back to his village. Saturday afternoon he set up a tyifunga. (2) enclosure around the village, as far as the river

2. Magic enclosure made of pinot palm leaves strung on a cord, to which is attributed the power to stop bad influences. After putting up the enclosure they purify the village by cleaning it completely.

and as far as the bush behind the village. He cleaned the village completely. He cut a long and strong rope, he went to slip one end of it into the river, he went to put the other in the bush.

On Sunday the Bush-Mama and the Water-Mama came and each pulled on an end of the rope. Anansi himself was not

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